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CIA lose allies 'because of Congress inquiries'

By RICHARD BEESTON in New York

MR WILLIAM COLBY, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has scathingly denounced Congress for staging "TV spectacles" and "sensational re-runs" about the agency for the amusement of the people.

In his toughest attack on congressional exposure of agency secrets, Mr Colby confirmed for the first time that some friendly foreign intelligence services now felt the risk of co-operating with the CIA was too great.

His speech to the United States Navy League in New York was timed to coincide with new hearings.

The Senate Intelligence Committee yesterday made public evidence, saying the CIA opened more than 215,000 letters to and from Russia over 20 years knowing the operation was illegal. One of the letters was sent to the committee chairman, Senator Frank Church, by his mother-in-law while on a visit to the Soviet Union.

Damage already done

In his speech Mr Colby asked: "Is our intelligence to become mere theatre? Will it be exposed in successive re-runs for the amusement, or even amazement, of our people rather than being preserved and protected for the benefit of us all?"

After months of quiet co-operation with congressional investigations and polite defence of his agency's record, he took the offensive. Damage he said had already been done by "irresponsible exposure of true intelligence secrets" which jeopardised intelligence "high in the sky and deep in the ocean."

The CIA had read mail to and from Communist countries during the "threatening days of the cold war." This had been revealed by the Rockefeller commission investigating American intelligence and that the CIA had reported the matter to the congressional bodies investigating it.

Would there be hearings in 1980, he asked, about why in 1975 America was deprived of its great intelligence capability?

Nuclear threat

Among the threats defined by Mr Colby as the CIA's concern were "the ballistic missiles cocked and aimed at us" and the danger of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of "reckless despots or pananoic terrorists."

A report in the *Washington Post* said yesterday that during the Kennedy Administration the CIA had almost as many employees attached to embassies as the State department.

At one time the CIA had 3,700 employees operating abroad under diplomatic or other official cover compared with 3,900 State Department employees abroad.